

Developing Your PEOPLE Skills

For technical professionals, dealing with people can be similar to dealing with the variable factor in an equation. People change and it's hard sometimes to decipher motivation and what drives them. But there is a logic to understanding people. Sometimes it takes a while to learn what that logic is, but with effort and a few tools, you can start piecing together these factors in the equation."

Leaders, who are superior in technical skills, on how to strengthen their communication skills and build better working relationships through the PEOPLE concept. PEOPLE stands for professionalism, empathy, optimism, partnering, loyalty, and empowerment. Professional engineers who want to be successful leaders, particularly in difficult times, must learn the best ways to engage the diverse individuals who make up their teams. Understanding what motivates people and what makes them most effective takes a different type of intelligence than analytical intelligence that technical professionals have. It takes an emotional and social intelligence. That is what the [PEOPLE] approach tries to build.



Professionalism

Leaders should remember the key components that make up professionalism and the importance of setting the organizational tone through good examples. You've got to know your job, know your stuff, and you have to show character. Also part of your competence is to communicate effectively and add that to your technical competence. When you add that to character—a person who does the right things—that's a powerful foundation for leading people.

Empathy

Any good leader should have empathy toward their colleagues and employees and show that they can be understanding and caring. Having empathy doesn't mean to be wishy-washy toward people and just be a pushover, but rather to understand and communicate to them in ways that make sense intellectually and emotionally.

Optimism

Optimism maybe one of the most important components of the PEOPLE concept, particularly because of the current uncertainty in the economy. Whenever there is uncertainty and instability, human beings will naturally become fearful, apprehensive, and anxious. When people are worried and pessimistic, they can't do their best thinking to find creative solutions. Successful leaders must maintain an optimistic attitude and allow that attitude to spread throughout their teams. Optimism and positivity creates a capacity to think that is creative and you can get divergent out-of-the-box thinking. You can't engage in creative problem solving when you're worried. You can do good analysis, but you can't do good brainstorming.

Partnering

A good dose of healthy competition can spur improvements, but some forms of competition can give rise to conflict and dysfunction. A dedication to collaboration should be paramount. True synergy is when you put together different ideas to come up with completely new ideas. If we put our heads together, we can find a solution that satisfies us—that's extremely creative and comes through true collaboration, not competition.

Loyalty

The PEOPLE approach defines loyalty as building energetic followers who persevere and are accountable not only to themselves, but to others. In order to develop this loyalty, leaders must offer

support and gain the trust of their employees. One of the things that we are trying to teach is that before a decision is made, there has to be debate and dialogue. After a decision is made, there has to be loyal support. You get buy-in when people's positions have been heard and incorporated.

Empowerment

Individuals in leadership positions need to empower team members and learn to "let go" and delegate tasks. There is some risk involved when delegating responsibility and authority, but it's a risk that if done right can reap big rewards. Delegating acknowledges that 'I can't do everything. Delegation is a form of partnership and sharing responsibilities and authority in the hope that you will help bring some new great ideas and approaches to problems. It's not in a manner of dumping on someone, but a form a teamwork.

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